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## Transgender issues in patriarchy

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### Abstract

The paper studies Kimberly Pierce's movie "Boys Don't Cry" to find out how the patriarchal attitude of our society adds to the suffering and trauma of transgender people. The movie revolves around Brandon Teena, a transgender individual, who adopts a male personality. Throughout the movie, Brandon constantly tries to escape and simultaneously fit into the gender requirements of society. Male-dominated patriarchal society becomes the source of homophobia or transphobia in the movie. The paper studies how gender classifications and patriarchal notions such as masculinity stereotype and dehumanize anyone who transgress their gender classification. The paper also emphasizes, how patriarchal society others females as inert and does violence against them.

**Keywords:** Masculinity, femineity, violence, transgender, patriarchy, dehumanization

### Introduction

"I just keep on laughing  
Hiding the tears in my eyes  
Because boys don't cry.  
Boys don't cry."

[Smith, Tolhurst, & Dempsey, 1988]

One could describe womanhood as a set of common experiences, although they might have varying lives, different levels of privileges and expectations of identity and gender performativity but oppression by the patriarchy is the only common thing that levels out all of their lives.

"Trans-gendering refers to the idea of moving across (transferring) from one preexisting gender category to the other (either temporarily or permanently), to the idea of living in between genders, and to the idea of transcending or living 'beyond gender' altogether." It is a social process that doesn't focus on types of people, they go against the societal norms where males suspend or renounce their masculinity while females embrace it. Their act of shunning away the conventional definitions of sexuality and sexual orientation could be a result of any forms of oppression (sexism, homophobia, racism), they embrace the opposite end of the gender spectrum, incapable of properly fitting into the oppressive and limiting gender binary. The potential assumptions raised for all forms of trans gendering, normal men do (and should) have male bodies and should have the appropriate display of masculinity while females require to have feminine bodies and display the appropriate femininity. Display of any gender, without the appropriate "accompaniments" masculinity or femininity is often depicted as "not real".

The era of 1950's brought the "real reality" of "gender identity", which later came to be conceptualized as psychological sex, it was privileged over the apparent reality of the body morphological sex. Our modern conception of transgenderism came in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was the beginning of what Foucault termed as "medicalization of the sexually peculiar". In 1989, the U.S supreme court heard the case of Ann Hopkins, who claimed that her promotion to partnership at her firm was postponed for two years in a row based on the fact that she did not conform to gender stereotypes. The head supervisor of her department, Thomas Beyer, told her that to increase chances of promotion, she needed "to walk more femininely, wear makeup, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry". Many male employees said they would not be comfortable having her as their partner because she did not act the way they believed a woman should. Upon appeal by Price Waterhouse, the supreme court upheld the lower court's ruling that making employment decisions based on gender stereotypes is sex discrimination and therefore a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Hopkins case worked as a foundational argument in favor of transgender protection in the workplace, although this gave us a clear picture that the transgender people exist somewhere below both men and women in a legalized caste system formed in the professional area.

Transsexuals go about first attempting to moderate the phase of puberty (something which every cis girl, trans boys, trans girls usually go through but is not typical of cis boys) and then attempting to deal as best they can without access to any medical care and with non-supportive family and friends. Their fear of admittance about their transsexuality is conditioned through society's caricature of "female" or "male" which is all absolute and pervasive and thus prevent the transwomen or transmen from coming into a gender which was not "intended" to be theirs. Transwoman internalize all the ways females are oppressed, they're being given male privilege, all the while terrified that someone will discover they're not boys and their male privileges will be snatched away. They have more in common with cis women than they do with cis men, once they're out in the open, they are treated as non-men, unmanly. They go through an adolescence full of verbal and physical bullying also they are referred to as "failed men" or "bad men" or "men in dressers", micro aggressions used by family or authority figures.

One of such incidents that happened in 1993 in Falls city, Nebraska, narrates the story of Brandon Teena who challenged hegemonic norms, she was murdered so that the traditional ideals of gender and heterosexuality could stay intact and to discipline other transgressors like her. The 21-year woman, Teena Brandon, who dressed like a male, was raped and brutally assaulted by her two friends John Lotter and Marvin Nissen. Almost a week later, Lotter and Nissen broke into the home where Brandon was staying and fatally shot and stabbed Brandon and two others to death who were also present there. But what really caught the news and media's attention was that Brandon was a girl who had adopted the mannerisms of a man, he dressed like a man, he socialized with females instead of males. The conspiracy to kill Brandon was an extension of the rape that could very well be termed as "hate crime". In *The Brandon Teena Story*, after the incident where she's raped, Brandon visited the hospital to receive the medical treatment for injuries sustained during assault, the hospital authorities contacted the Police. After questioning Brandon about the assault and confirming that Brandon's injuries were consistent with rape, oral and written statements were filed about the assault with Sheriffs. Although they both knew the whereabouts and identity of the suspects but they failed to issue a warrant for their arrest. The oral testimony that follows *The Brandon Teena Story* with an interview of suspect John Lotter, states that his friend inserted his fingers inside Brandon's vagina so that Brandon's true gender identity could be confirmed through the exhibition of female genitals, he justified his statement further by telling Sheriffs that the verification could only be done by touching or penetrating female genitals.

Brandon Teena's story is just one of the examples where males display physical domination as a device to show females where they belong in the societal strata below males, to put them 'back in their place'. "Suppression of female masculinities allows for male masculinity to stand unchallenged as the bearer of gender stability and gender deviance". The interview that took place between the sheriff

and Brandon shows how sheriff ousted Brandon as a deprived, pathological, and dehumanized 'other'. Brandon was on the physical level a female, the questions that were hurled at Brandon: why did she pull her pants down for those boys? Why did she kiss girls? For the sheriff, Brandon was an outsider- playing it smart with the boys in the social masculine circles and leering beautiful girls, a deceiver. The sheriff's assumptions about Brandon's sexual identity has an important connection with Brandon's murder, his characterization of Brandon as an 'it' dehumanizes Brandon, the relationship with women as a sign of monstrosity. Brandon's inability to be neatly classified as either female or male exposed him to misogyny and homophobia, extreme forms of sexuality and gender based discrimination, violence and domination.

Brandon tried to conform to the socially constructed visions of the male figure and external expectations of masculinity rather than sticking to the assigned gender and lady-like manner, the desire to fit in and be treated as an equal in a male dominated society, to be accepted as a male trapped in a female's body. The risk of violence faced by trans genders because of limitations of gender binaries which are built upon assumptions that gender is linked to biological sex, transgressors become a threat to the natural order of things and also to the law and masculinity. Brandon's rape serves as a reminder for other trans people that hegemonic masculinity reigns supreme in the gender hierarchy. Brandon had to pay for gender transgression through rape and assault and then a symbolic re- rape by the criminal justice system and law enforcement personnel. The insensitivity to the emotional need of rape survivors, on the part of police personnel is invasive and offensive, Brandon moves from the realm of victim to that of accused by going through the legal shredding of his identity.

Many activists resist identifying Brandon as a closeted lesbian while in the medical community, pathological terms like sexual identity crisis or gender dysphoria could be used for Brandon. In early 1990's, Brandon was tricked by his mother into visiting a General Hospital's psychiatrist where he was diagnosed with a sexual identity crisis, this example of medical community's handling of Brandon's identity as a form of disease conforms to society's objective to cure or manage whatever deems abnormal. Although amidst all this chaos, Brandon described himself either a male, an individual with a sexual identity crisis, or a hermaphrodite. On several occasions, he had confessed in front of his family members and friends that in order to obtain sex reassignment surgery, he went through counseling and it was required of Brandon to live like a man for some time. The counselor who had several sessions with Brandon states that Brandon believed she was a man, a man trapped in a woman's body. She didn't identify herself as a lesbian.

Based on biological sex, the categorization of gender, dictates how individuals treat one another based on societal construction and surface information. The portrayal of an alpha male has been attached with aggression and violence, their hegemonic masculinity is pressurized on by the society as a cultural norm to use force and physical dominance as a method to solving problems, the use of gendered violence to re-inforce their control over women. The rape of a transwomen or a lesbian is considered a punishment by a man to 'correct' her sexual behavior. Many theorists have linked heterosexuality and homophobia to hegemonic masculinity, where the element of masculinity lies in seeing

women as sexual objects, also physical dominance over women is seen as sexual validation for the heterosexual men while they practice hostility towards homosexuality, which is associated with effeminacy.

Pierce's film "Boys don't cry", works on reclaiming Brandon's life story from the perspective of a girl passing as a boy. It presents a sympathetic narration of the trans individual and offers the challenge to do away with societal boundaries and confront the issues related to sexuality and gender. It shows how the dominant ideologies related with masculinity makes sure that the power is reinforced in the hands of the heterosexual men over women, homosexuals and transsexuals. Brandon was deemed as an outsider by the society and as a result, he became the target of social punishment. Brutal hate crimes are committed against the LGBTQs, Brandon's was the first hate crime against the trans genders that caught large media attention, it was not the last though, like the murders of other transgendered persons, Baretta Williams and Rita Hester by male attackers. A male to female transgendered person, Rita, was stabbed almost 20 times by male attackers in her apartment while Baretta Williams was tied, battered and shot 16 times, less than a year after Rita Hester was killed.

The transgendered individuals who have completed their sexual transformation from male to female are often shocked when they come face to face with the oppression women suffer in society on daily basis. They are exposed to a lot of physical dangers and societal constraints. Both men and women are targeted in transgender violence but Brandon Teena's story highlights the heightened hostility and brutality against transsexuality. While any attempts to find the truth about gender and identity is accompanied by serious risks in "Boys don't cry", the film also depict the female body's vulnerability in the society that worships power and dominance over the subordinate gender.

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